

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 IO-14 ISO-00 SAJ-01 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

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INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

AMEMBASSY VIENNA

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

USMISSION USNATO

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 2977

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR,UR, VT

SUBJECT: GROMYKO VISIT TO VATICAN

SUMMARY: GROMYKO AND PONTIFF DISCUSSED EUROPEAN SECURITY, MIDDLE EAST AND JERUSALEM, AND CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SOVIET UNION. POPE ALSO RAISED QUESTION OF PERSONS MISSING IN WW II WHO HAD NEVER RETURNED FROM SOVIET UNION. MEETING BEST CHARACTERIZED AS ANOTHER SMALL STEP BY VATICAN TO KEEP DOOR OPEN TO EASTERN EUROPEAN SOCIALIST LEADERSHIP BUT DEFINITELY NO NEW GROUND BROKEN, ESPECIALLY SINCE GROMYKO EITHER VAGUE OR NONCOMMITTAL ON ISSUES OF PRIME CONCERN TO CHURCH.END SUMMARY.

1. ARCHBISHOP CASAROLI, VATICAN "FONMIN," HAS INFORMED US THAT GROMYKO'S 40-MINUTE AUDIENCE WITH POPE PAUL ON FEB. 21 PRODUCED CONFIDENTIAL

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NO SURPRISES OR BROKE NO NEW GROUND. CONVERSATION VERY GENERAL

AND BRIEF SINCE OVER HALF OF TIME LOST WITH INTERPRETING AND FORMALITIES. MAIN TOPICS WERE EUROPEAN SECURITY, MIDDLE EAST AND JERUSALEM, AND CHURCH IN SOVIET UNION. POPE ALSO EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN FOR WORLD WAR II PRISONERS WHO HAD BEEN LOST IN SOVIET UNION.

2. RE JERUSALEM, GROMYKO NOTED THAT USSR AGREES HOLY SEE HAS A LEGITIMATE RIGHT TO BECOME INVOLVED AND THAT USSR WOULD WELCOME VATICAN VIEWS BEING ARIED AT GENEVA WHEN RIGHT MOMENT CAME. GROMYKO OPINED, HOWEVER, THAT PROBLEM OF JERUSALEM WAS STILL LONG WAY OFF. NO MENTION MADE OF FRAMEWORK IN WHICH HOLY SEE COULD EXPRESS ITS VIEWS, NOR WERE QUESTIONS OF ROLE FOR SOVIETS OF FOR RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN JERUSALEM SETTLEMENT RAISED.

3. POPE RAISED QUESTION OF LATIN RITE CHURCH IN SOVIET UNION, NOTING THAT HIS INITIAL DESIRE WAS TO SEE BISHOPS NAMED IN ORDER TO REPLACE COMPLETELY DECIMATED ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE WITHOUT WHICH NO MEANINGFUL CHURCH LIFE POSSIBLE. POPE ALSO APPEALED FOR GREATER RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN SOVIET UNION. GROMYKO RESPONDED WITH LANGUAGE RUSSIANS HAD USED AT HELSINKI, WHERE THEY EVEN SUPPORTED VATICAN'S AGENDA ITEM ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, NAMELY THAT RELIGIOUS FREEDOM WAS GUARANTEED IN SOVIET CONSTITUTION. WITHOUT MAKING ANY COMMITMENTS, GROMYKO ALSO TOLD POPE THAT HE WOULD ASK HIS GOVERNMENT TO STUDY QUESTION OF NAMING BISHOPS IN SOVIET CATHOLIC CHURCH. POPE LAID SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON BALTIC AREA AND UKRANINE, BUT DID NOT RAISE QUESTION OF UKRAINIAN UNIATE CHURCH OF OF THOSE DIOCESES DIVIDED BETWEEN USSR AND POLAND.

4. ALTHOUGH VATICAN BOMBARDED THESE WEEKS WITH APPEALS FROM FAMILIES OF ITALIANS LOST IN SOVIET UNION IN WW II, POPE DECIDED AS INTERNATIONAL FIGURE TO MAKE GENERAL APPEAL TO GROMYKO FOR ALL POW'S WHO FAILED RETURN FROM USSR. GROMYKO TOLD POPE HE WOULD ASK HIS GOVERNMENT TO INVESTIGATE FURTHER BUT STRESSED THAT SOVIET GOVERNMENT CONVINCED THAT NO MISSING PERSONS FROM WW II STILL REMAIN USSR.

5. CASAROLI SEES A NUMBER OF REASONS IMPELLING GROMYKO TO SEEK AUDIENCE IN FIRST PLACE. ON NEGATIVE SIDE WAS NO DOUBT DESIRE TO AVOID CRITICISM IN ITALY FOR NOT MAKING NORMALLY EXPECTED CALL ON POPE, ESPECIALLY WHEN HE HAD DONE SO ON PRECEDING ITALIAN CONFIDENTIAL

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VISITS. MORE IMPORTANT, HOWEVER, CASAROLI SEES SOVIET DESIRE TO MAINTAIN IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH HOLY SEE IN CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN SECURITY AND OTHER ASPECTS OF SOVIET WORLDWIDE PEACE OFFENSIVE. THERE ARE CERTAIN AREAS OF OVERLAP BETWEEN SOVIET AND VATICAN VIEWS AND SOVIETS DOUBTLESSLY HOPE TO EXPLOIT THESE, CASAROLI NOTED, AS WELL AS OBTAIN SOME PROPAGANDA VALUE FROM APPEARING TO COOPERATE WITH CATHOLIC CHURCH. VATICAN HAS FEW ILLUSIONS, HOWEVER, ABOUT HOW FAR ANY SUCH COOPERATION CAN

REALLY GO. NONETHELESS, CASAROLI CONTINUED, CHURCH MUST MAKE
WHATEVER EFFORTS IT CAN TO GUARANTEE AT LEAST CHANCES
FOR CHURCH'S SURVIVAL IN SOCIALIST COUNTRIES, PROVIDING, HOWEVER,
IT DOES NOT COMPROMISE BASIC PRINCIPLES OR PAY RIDICULOUSLY HIGH
PRICE. UNFORTUNATELY SOME CRITICS IN WEST, ESPECIALLY AMONG
EMIGRE GROUPS, CANNOT APPRECIATE NEED FOR AMING EVEN LIMITED
ADJUSTMENTS TO REALITIES OF SOCIALIST SOCIETY, CASAROLI LAMENTED.
BUT, HE CONCLUDED, MUCH AS WE ALL REGRET IT, SOCIALIST REGIMES
IN EASTERN EUROPE ARE NOT NEARING COLLAPSE AND VATICAN HAS NO
ALTERNATIVE BUT TO ATTEMPT TO STRIKE BEST POSSIBLE BARGAINS WITH
THEM. WESTERN EUROPE AND US, HE SAID, CAME TO THIS REALIZATION
MUCH EARLIER THAN VATICAN, AND IT WOULD BE SUICIDAL FOR CHURCH
TO CLOSE ITS EYES TO REALITY AND REFUSE TO NEGOTIATE WITH
COMMUNIST LEADERS. VOLPE

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